

23 November 1966

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NORTH VIETNAM

I. There is evidence that the domestic situation in North Vietnam has deteriorated somewhat over the past two months, partly because of the damage to the DRV transportation system as a result of US air strikes, and also because of a poor harvest this fall.

A. It seems likely, moreover, that the DRV leaders must realize that military developments in South Vietnam are not going well for them.

1. On balance, however, our evidence indicates that things are not so bad as to warrant a belief that Hanoi is ready to lower its demands in order to get a negotiated settlement of the war.

B. Reports

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that the people seem to be getting enough food, although it is rationed.

1. Morale remains fairly high.
2. Road and rail traffic continues to move despite the intensive air strikes.
3. Supplies of POL appear to be arriving regularly.

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4. In short, although life is difficult in North Vietnam, it is not desperate and there is no sign that the regime must now move to end the war.

II. There have been recent assurances from Eastern European sources that a cessation of US air strikes will create favorable conditions for Hanoi to begin negotiations. These assurances may be at least in part the result of an overly pessimistic reading of the effects on Hanoi of the bombing and the lack of significant military success in the South.

A. The sophisticated weapons Hanoi has added to its air defense arsenal have thus far proved to be relatively ineffective.

1. The DRV's in-country jet fighter force consists of about 15 MIG-21s and 55 MIG-15/17s.
2. An additional 45 MIG-15/17s are kept in reserve at Chinese airfields and are drawn upon for replacements when North Vietnamese fighters are downed.
3. Thus far, over 30 North Vietnamese jets have been shot down by US fighters.
4. The US has lost eleven aircraft in these engagements.

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B. The Soviet-supplied surface-to-air missiles are not proving to be as effective as conventional ground fire.

1. Only about 3 percent of the missiles fired thus far have downed manned US aircraft.
2. The percentage against unmanned drones is much higher.
3. The SAMs are effective, however, in forcing US pilots to fly at much lower altitudes than they would normally, thus rendering them more vulnerable to ground fire.

Infiltration Into South Vietnam

III. It is estimated that total infiltration for 1966 will run between 65,000 to 95,000 men; roughly three times that of 1965.

A. MACV's figures for the first 10 months of 1966 in all categories (confirmed, probable and possible) now total some ⁷¹71,000 men. The total of confirmed and probable infiltration is ~~about~~ ^{48,000} 48,000 thus far.

1. The average monthly infiltration in these two categories for the first eight months of 1966--which has not been a constant figure--is about 6,000 men.

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2. An additional average of 2,400 men per month are carried in the possible category.

B. Very few new North Vietnamese units have been identified in South Vietnam in recent months. This may be due, in great measure, to the lag between the time a unit arrives and the time sufficient information is available to accept it in the order of battle.

1. Nevertheless, we believe that some new NVA units have been arriving in South Vietnam, mostly in the northern provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien.
2. Other infiltration groups--containing replacements and cadre personnel--are probably still using the standard infiltration route through the Laos panhandle and into the central highlands area of South Vietnam.
3. It has not been possible to determine the percentage of men in units as opposed to replacements.

South Vietnamese Military Situation

IV. The Allied strategy of simultaneous and wide-ranging search-and-destroy/spoiling operations against major Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army troop concentrations and base areas has been largely responsible

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for preventing Communist main force units from assuming an effective multibattalion offensive posture in the I, II, and III Corps areas of South Vietnam during most of 1966. In the IV Corps, ARVN forces have generally contained the Viet Cong main force threat, confining enemy actions largely to the small-scale harassment of isolated, lightly-defended GVN paramilitary positions and lines of communication.

A. In I Corps, US Marine Operations HASTINGS

(7 July-3 August) and the ongoing PRAIRIE have disrupted the North Vietnamese Army buildup which began in May 1966 in the northern Quang Tri Province/DMZ area.

1. More than 2,100 NVA troops have been killed in these operations.
2. However, at least two NVA divisions--the 324 "B" and the 341st--remain in this area and continue to consolidate a major base of operations within and south of the formerly neutral buffer zone.
3. The near-term objective of this Communist buildup is probably to inflict the maximum possible attrition on allied forces in difficult terrain through a semi-conventional style of warfare.

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- B. In the central highlands of II Corps, Cambodian border surveillance Operation PAUL REVERE has delayed or disrupted anticipated major offensive action by the 1st NVA Division (formerly the 630th Division) against government positions in Pleiku and Kontum provinces.
1. Twenty-two hundred enemy troops have been killed since multibattalion US infantry forces began this campaign in early May.
- C. The Communist threat in the south-central portion of coastal Binh Dinh Province has also been significantly reduced by the highly successful recent allied Operation IRVING. Fifteen allied battalions led by the US 1st Air Cavalry Division, participated in IRVING (1-24 October), which cost the Communists losses of 2,000 killed, 1,765 captured, and 5,700 suspects detained.
1. IRVING seriously disrupted the local Viet Cong infrastructure in at least two districts of the province.
 2. The operation also forced major elements of the 3rd NVA Division (formerly the 610th Division) to disperse to more secure areas.

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D. In III Corps, Operation ATTLEBORO, involving the largest allied task force ever fielded during the Vietnam War (17 US and 2 ARVN battalions) presented the first serious challenge to previously uncontested Communist control of War Zone "C" in northern Tay Ninh Province.

1. ^{Conducted from} [Since its initiation on 14 October ^{to 25 November,} ATTLEBORO [has] inflicted losses of 1,100 killed on probable major elements of the 9th Viet Cong Light Infantry Division and 101st NVA Regiment.
2. In addition, allied troops [have] ^{or destroyed} captured vast amounts of foodstuffs and war materiel, including an estimated 4.8 million pounds of rice.
3. While most of the action in ATTLEBORO [has] been centered on the southern fringes of War Zone "C", the operation [has] nonetheless caused serious command and control problems for COSVN--the political and military headquarters for Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam.

V. The pattern of Communist military activity in the past few months suggests that the allied spoiling operations have forced a significant revision in the enemy's strategy.

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A. He is no longer seeking with masses of manpower to overwhelm strategic allied outposts like Plei Me, which he was hitting last fall.

1. The last such attack, on the special forces camp at A Shau in northwestern South Vietnam, took place in ^{March} ~~February~~.
2. The purpose of such attacks was partly to spark the deployment of a large allied reaction force which was a prime target for ambush.
3. The Communists found, however, that given the growing allied ability to react with overwhelming air and ground firepower, the price they paid in casualties was too much to bear.

B. Now the enemy main forces seem to be generally on the defensive.

1. Occasionally they have been noted mustering for what looked like an upcoming attack, but the subsequent allied reaction in each case appears to have disrupted their plans.

C. In the central highlands they seem to be engaged to some extent in a strategy of maneuver.

1. Enemy units continue to move around guardedly, apparently hoping to draw the allies into short, localized engagements in which the odds are heavily with the Communists.

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2. In the past couple of weeks, they have had some success: several company-sized or smaller US elements have been hit hard.
3. In each case, however, the Communists have payed a stiff price in casualties.
4. They have, ^{nevertheless} however, been successful in cutting the overall attrition rate on their units in the highlands.

VI. Meanwhile, the enemy has begun to put a much greater propaganda emphasis on the guerrilla side of the war.

- A. Each day brings new admonitions on the value of hit and run raid and terrorist type actions against the allies, both as a means of tying the friendly forces and of sustaining the Communist grass-roots position in the countryside.
- B. So far, the statistics reflect little change in guerrilla-type actions, but they could well rise in the coming months.
- C. In the last analysis, the Communists are most interested in maintaining their hold over large portions of the rural populace.
 1. They may be hoping to accomplish this largely by guerrilla actions while their main forces threaten larger-scale attacks in order to keep the bulk of allied units tied up and unable to concentrate on pacification.

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South Vietnamese Politics

- VII. Political activity is on the increase in South Vietnam, largely because there is now an established process and timetable for the evolution to a constitutional government.
- A. The political interests of various groups, both in and out of power, are being sharpened by this evolution, especially by the prospect of national elections next year.
 - B. As yet, however, true national parties, alliances, or coalitions are not in sight, and traditional Vietnamese "watching and waiting" continues to play a reasonably significant role in the political scene.
 - C. The Constituent Assembly, elected in September, is thus far the major manifestation of the political evolution.
 - 1. The Assembly has undergone an initial period of formulation, elected its officers, and now must draft a constitution by late March.
 - 2. Extreme regional and anti-military interests have been fairly well contained so far in the Assembly, which, in its actions, has taken a generally moderate and responsible stance.

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3. At the same time, a solid majority of the delegates object to the government's current veto power over the Assembly's draft constitution, and to the limited jurisdiction of the Assembly.
 4. These delegates have presented their suggestions for Assembly-government relations to the military leaders, who will probably try to go part way in satisfying the Assembly.
 5. Since the Assembly also desires to avoid an all-out confrontation with the government, a compromise on these issues will probably result.
- D. The evolution process has also given rise to some regional frictions and to civilian-military differences.
1. The recent cabinet dispute between Premier Ky and a handful of southern ministers was largely a reflection of these problems.
 2. Southern (Cochin Chinese) civilian ministers objected to the degree of real government power exercised by military officers, especially those of northern (Tonkinese) origin.
 3. The Southerners also fear that next year's elections may be adversely influenced by the current imbalance of power.

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Although the cabinet has not worked out for the present, the general issues of regional distrust and mutual suspicion between civilians and the military lie just beneath the surface.

- E. Despite such friction, the military establishment maintains firm control of the government.
 - 1. Despite current regional feelings Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu have felt confident enough to remove a powerful southern corps commander because of widespread rumors of corruption.
 - 2. Nevertheless, they were more or less bound to replace him with another southerner, and to compromise further by offering him a cabinet post.
- F. In the larger perspective of the constitutional government, the military leaders have apparently not yet decided how to exercise their power, which has been the backbone of the Vietnamese political structure since 1963.
 - 1. They could attempt to form a military-based national party and compete in national presidential elections, or secure constitutional provisions which allow for a military voice, or both.

2. The decision made by the military in this respect and the means used to implement it will undoubtedly go a long way towards determining the success or failure of the evolution process.